

How Can We Teach Peace When We Are So Outraged? A Call for Critical Peace Education

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If we are to reach real peace in the world, we will have to begin with the children.

—M.Ghandi

In this piece I will share needed reconceptualizing directions for a *Critical Peace Education* in the United States. At a recent conference (13th annual Early Childhood Reconceptualizing Conference) in Madison, Wisconsin, I shared the personal frustration that so many of us are feeling when I asked, “How can we teach peace when we are so pissed off?”

This drawing by an 11 year old states, “This is how you destroy a peaceful nation.”



The outrage so many of us are feeling makes it imperative that we walk our talk, speak our truth, and know our life's mission.

The energy from our frustration with the political, with the aggressive, with the patriarchal, with the privileged, with the capitalist, with the racist, with the sexist tends to make us feel quite powerless as the neo-liberals continue to exert their all encompassing right wing ideologies. This patriarchal racist/sexist/capitalist agenda has meant that human rights, economic dignity, and social equity have been sacrificed to benefit a few ideologues.

Data from United for Fair Economy (UFE) (http://www.faireconomy.org/research/wealth_charts.html) shows that in 2001 the distribution of wealth ownership in the U.S. indicated that the top 1% owned 32.7% while the bottom 50% owned 2.8%. the change in average

household net worth from 1983-1998 was a loss of 76.3% by the bottom 40% while the top 1% gained 42.2%. With regard to the total ownership of stocks, mutual funds and retirement accounts the top 1% owned 42.1% while the bottom 90% owned 21.3%. While Bill Clinton's campaign workers shouted "it's about the economy stupid" it appears that George Bush is clamoring for "it's about the oil stupid." This latter idea brings us to the frustration of the war on Iraq. This immoral, unnecessary, unlawful, colonial occupation continues to harness its aggression against so many. And about the oil prices? What did the oil barons testify in Congress? Who stands to benefit?

Reese Erlich (2005) notes, that during the Persian Gulf War, the United States and Britain fired 320 tons of depleted uranium (DU) ammunition. And the United States is using depleted uranium ammunition again in the current war with Iraq. Critics say an inordinate number of children exposed to DU—even years later—get cancer, and many are born with birth defects. The Pentagon says DU poses no danger to civilians.



This girl, diagnosed with a tumor, undergoes treatment at the children's hospital in Basra, Iraq. Doctor's there blame the increasing number of childhood cancers on the US use of depleted uranium ammunition. Pentagon officials insist that DU doesn't harm civilians and that the cancers and birth defects may have been caused by the use of poison gas in the Iran-Iraq war.

*—Photo by
Reese Erlich.*

The notion that peace is possible is currently being challenged across the globe in the United States, Iraq, Liberia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Israel/Palestine, Myanmar, Colombia, Bosnia, Indonesia, Korea, and many other national and

geopolitical contexts. In the U.S., children and youth are criminalized and pathologized and frequently witness violence. Young children are now exposed to a world where war and conflict are everyday occurrences. The need for greater understanding about how to address these challenges is crucial in order to establish peaceful solutions.

The Hague Agenda for the 21st century includes the following statement, which helps to articulate the rationale for a universal education emphasizing a culture of peace:

A culture of peace will be achieved when citizens of the world understand global problems; have the skills to resolve conflict constructively; know and live by international standards of human rights, gender and racial equality; appreciate cultural diversity; and respect the integrity of the Earth. Such learning cannot be achieved without intentional, sustained and systematic peace education. (The Hague Appeal for Peace Global Campaign for Peace Education, May, 1999)

Peace education is historically viewed as situated in a variety of sub-fields that rely on practices and perspectives that are varied, multidisciplinary, and assume mutually beneficial relationships, and is sometimes identified as universal respect for human rights, and assumes the presence of social justice and equity. As scholars working in the fields of bilingual/multicultural, (early) childhood education and foundations of education, we can approach our discussion of peace education from a number of mutually enriching vantage points. Peace education is defined as being “the transmission of knowledge about, requirements of, the obstacles to and possibilities for achieving and maintaining peace, training in skills for interpreting the knowledge, and the development of reflective and participatory activities for applying the knowledge to overcoming problems and achieving possibilities” (Reardon, 1999).

In the past 20 years children under 16 have fought in at least 16 wars in 25 countries. (UNICEF, 1996)

In who’s name we ask? We know that there are 30,000 wars raging in the world, over 300,000 child soldiers, 2 million children have died in the past decade, 90% of the casualties are civilian, and 12 million children are homeless from war. Children are forced into recruitment, are separated from their families, are armed with lethal weapons, and suffer deep trauma (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2003).

Elise Boulding (2000) describes the behavioral dynamics of peaceableness in selected contemporary societies. These societies place a high value on non-aggression, noncompetitiveness, and handle conflict in a variety of non-violent ways. The childrearing and the education of children with such values is an important and salient element (see Enslin & Horsthemke’s (2004) discussion of an interesting value of “ubuntu” in Africa). The Quakers in Pennsylvania have advocated for peaceableness for many decades.

Fifty thousand Gallegan children are calling for peace. I have visited the Santiago de Compostelo peace initiative earmarked for teachers on two occasions. The Galician Peace Education Seminar (SGEP) was initiated by teachers of differing educational levels in Galicia, the northwest part of Spain. The educators realized that



there was a lack of teaching materials dealing with Peace Education (including human rights, tolerance, ecopacifism, intercultural). SGEP affirms a Galician character and seeks to promote Peace Education at schools; to share ecopacifists and non discriminatory values including solidarity, tolerance, and interculturalism; and to collaborate and to cooperate with similar organizations. The SGEP's activities include the promotion of January 30 as the "School Day for Peace" honoring Gandhi's death; encouragement of the study and research about peace and the human rights; to implement numerous cultural activities, and publications relating to peace and human rights; to conduct yearly seminars on Peace Education (since 1985); to participate and cooperate in solidarity campaigns; to design and share teaching materials for the Peace Education curriculum leading to educational reform; to organize courses, conferences, and round table; and to grant annual prizes to groups or individuals reflecting Pro and Contra Peace.

"Nunca Mas" is an organization indicating the need to speak and to never again (nunca mas) be silent in the midst of aggression.

Why hasn't the U.S. signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child? Only two countries have not ratified this document that protects children's human rights: Somalia and the U.S. (See Convention on the rights of the child at the UNICEF web site). The aggressive patriarchal spirit is reaching schools



50,000 children



when young children are “tasered” by police. In Miami police have used taser guns on a first grader, a 12 year old girl, and a 6 year old boy (http://www.cbs47.com/news/local/story.aspx?content_id=B4B98F6C-8E13-4C8C-8FE0-EE9F0B505D66) these guns are capable of delivering 50,000 volts of shocks.

Reconceptualizing Peace Education in the U.S.

These ideas speak to future needed directions in U.S. peace education that reflects a critical perspective. A critical perspective that relies on guidance from multiple lenses capable of demystifying the complexities of peace education.

First, a critical peace education will ensure that issues of power are central to collaborative dialogues.

Second, critical peace education will recognize the need to pursue spiritual aspects of the questions.

Third, critical peace education will allow Freire’s transformative pedagogy to guide the need for consciousness raising.

Fourth, critical peace education will understand cultural and linguistic aspects of Anzaldua’s “border crossing” mestiza consciousness.

Fifth, critical peace education will move beyond a Eurocentric colonizing lens while recognizing the need for Smith's decolonizing lens.

Sixth, critical peace education will realize the need for inclusively, thereby driving us beyond identity politics.

Seventh, critical peace education will implement needed community action projects with a Participatory Action Research/feminist lens.

Eight, critical peace education will reach our Dreamspace for social justice with equitable economic distribution.

Ninth, critical peace education will Rely on Love as an inclusive alternate paradigm in solidarity transcending existing conditions and reality.

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